



Robert W.
Lowndes,
Editor

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★ ★ *Moving swiftly, Conrad and Kaye subdued Krishna.* ★ ★

THEY WILL DESTROY

By Bryce Walton

"Don't you see, you idiots? We're in section 80-epicenter-57. That little light right there happens to be *Sol!*"...But they shouldn't have been back home; they should have been in M-32 in Andromeda!



CONRAD'S stirring consciousness told him that the fantastic journey had ended. The automatic equipments beside their beds were geared to waken them as they approached that far, far constellation. M-32 in Andromeda.

Andromeda! He didn't feel the injectors punching new life into his limbs; he didn't feel anything except growing fear. He heard the voiceless

sussuration of the ship as it thrust itself on through the cold and lifeless night. Something was horribly wrong!

While relays and photoelectric circuits assured his steady rise from the still dust of suspended animation, Conrad's wide-set brown eyes stared wildly at the chronometer. His big body trembled in his bed.

Surely the chronometer was wrong. But the ship was no stronger than any one of its many intricate parts, and everything else was working properly. Suspended animation, the only possible way a human could manage the vast journey, was scheduled to be broken as the ship reached one point

Feature Novelet of Human Destiny

five light years distance from the fringe of the star system of M-32 in Andromeda. At that instant of awaking, allowing for errors involving such great sweeps of space-time, the chronometer should register approximately three hundred years.

It didn't, though. The dial pointed an unshaking finger at—six hundred years.

Six hundred years, four months, twenty-two days, five hours, eighteen minutes, and—

But what did the seconds matter? The four of them had slept on in their suspended animation at least twice as long as they were scheduled to. Nine hundred thousand light years too long.

Surrounded by that infinite darkness expanding forever beyond the thin shell of the spaceship, Conrad was suddenly bathed in cold sweat. Blinking, he peered across the small sleeping cubicle at the other three. None of their shadowy bodies moved in the dim autoluminescence. His eyes passed over the big clumsy body of Karl Koehler the astrophysicist and galactician; over the slim delicate body of Frank Hudson, astrogator and electro-engineer. He looked at his wife.

Tears stung his eyes as he looked at Kaye. She was so beautiful with her head pillowed in a deep cushion of violet-black hair. And she was alive; the dials showed their vague spark of life. That was the almost-frightening reality—all alive after so long.

Alive, and lost, somewhere, somehow—

Trembling impatiently to find out what had happened, and with fear of finding out, Conrad waited. Other injectors kept his nerves anesthetized against the intense pain of returning sensation.

Finally, after almost two hours, he was able to get up and move about. The others should be awaking too; something else was wrong. Hurriedly he set their awakening equipment to working, then ran to the forward control chamber, groping his way fearfully through the strangely alien-feeling cylindrical body of the hundred-metre spaceship.

But he didn't open the door. Not just then. No use going in until the others were conscious. He wouldn't understand the full significance of the astrocharts without Koehler. Nor could he know whether or not 'Kilroy', the automatic pilot, had gotten out of commission without Hudson.

He wandered back to the sleeping cubicle. What colossal blind faith they had put in the ship, especially in 'Kilroy.' They had trusted completely in the ability of that mass of free electrons, magnetic fields in a hard vacuum; and it had lost them unmercifully in a timeless immensity somewhere at least 90,000 light beyond M-32 in Andromeda.

Nothing could be done toward finding what had happened, or easing their circumstance except as a group. The others were specialists; he the 'coordinator', a graduate of the Synthesis Academy. He was a non-specialist act-

It has been noted that strong tendencies of mechanistic-mysticism prevail in our times. We saw primitive examples of this in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy; and we see a more advanced type in the Soviet Union, where the pseudo-science of dialectical materialism functions as the religion of a culture. It is not the form of the "state", or of the economic theory, etc., but rather an expression of the predominant psychological feeling of the period. In this story, Mr. Walton suggests a fully-matured, end-product of the trend, as well as a possible counterpart to it.

ing as informal 'Captain' of the experimental flight, man's first beyond his own galaxy in which had been found only faint hints of intelligent life. His job was to correlate the work of the specialists.

Conrad slid nervously back along the bulkhead. Through the appalling thinness between him and that black abyss beyond the ship he could feel the infinite whispering night rushing, rushing—

The others were begining to stir painfully. While he waited, he relieved some of the tension by opening and eating a can of concentrates; but after that he felt no better.

He sat there broodingly, his head in moist hands. There was something in his brain, something psychosomatic that ached because it shouldn't be there and wanted to get out. The ache symbolized something else, suppressed, he was sure; it was a hidden fear—perhaps something deeper than fear—imprisoned there.

LATER THEY sat looking at each other, aware of the mutual fear growing among them. Kaye's hand rested in his. Her peculiarly opaque eyes studied all of the others with the discerning eyes of psychiatry. The giant Koehler stretched, his big jaws yawning widely. "Well, Hudson, you ready?"

Koehler's dislike for Hudson was ill-concealed. Conrad understood that, though he had tried to control his own distaste for Hudson's particular psychological type. Cynical, egomaniacal—incipient paranoia, Kaye had said. His motivation for volunteering for this flight was a symptom; he had said he wanted to be the pioneer of man's eventual conquest of the Universe. Unpleasant obsession, Conrad had thought. Yet many men at the time they had left earth had probably had somewhat similar ideas.

But those men were gone now, dead a long time. What men moved now in their patterns? What ideas prevailed

now? Little chance of their ever finding out.

Hudson was smiling thinly. "Sure. Let's take a look at 'Kilroy.' Not that it makes any difference now; we're through. A delicate mechanism like this either works right, or very, very wrongly. And it caught us asleep. But we're only the first; not important. Men are tired of a barren Utopia. We need a Universe to conquer, to bend to our will. There'll be plenty of other ships."

Kaye smiled at him. "We each have our individual motivations for volunteering for this journey, Hudson. Koehler simply loved the stars. Alan—" her eyes found Conrad's—"wanted a chance to lead men under new conditions, test his power of adaptation as a coordinator. As a psychiatrist, my reason is primarily an interest in human reaction to such inhuman conditions as this, and possibly to help in case of maladjustments. But yours, Hudson, seems to be compensatory. Don't you get any *personal* satisfaction? Is a dream of some future vast conquest your whole motivation?"

"Is it?" Hudson was on his feet. His eyes were narrow. "I rather think it's my own affair; I'm not concerned with your psuedo-scientific prying."

Conrad intervened. "Break it up! I hope we can all realize how important unity is going to be from here on out. Come on and let's see what the control chamber has to say."

"It won't make any difference," said Hudson as he started up the tubular corridor.

"He's probably right," growled Koehler in his deep monotonous basso. "We're lost. I could have plotted our return from M-32; that was all arranged. But from wherever we are now—" He shrugged his huge shoulders.

INSIDE the control chamber, Koehler voiced one booming roar of astonishment, stood staring at the observation screen over the control panel.

He stood there with his mouth hanging open, then whispered. "It can't be—it can't."

Conrad and Kaye saw no meaning in the screen, saw only dead blackness spread across with countless billions of lifeless frigid white dots. Hudson wasn't interested in the screen. His slender hands ran lovingly over the smooth gleaming surface of Kilroy, a big case of hard vacuum, aswirl with electrons and dynamic magnetic fields.

Hudson checked dials, gauges, graphs. "Kilroy's okay. Nothing wrong with the controls." That's what his voice said, noticed Conrad, but his eyes shifted, swirled with little specks of hidden fear. "Yes, I'm sure Kilroy has operated perfectly. But that chronometer—you, Koehler, lover of the stars. What do the stars say?"

"Ahhhh—" groaned Koehler. "Take a good long look at this chart; check it with what you see there on the screen. I'll have a padded cell rigged up."

They kept on looking.

Koehler cried. "Don't you see, you idiots? We're in section 80-epicenter-57! That little light right there happens to be *Sol*! We're inside Pluto's orbit now. That's *Earth*."

Conrad managed a harsh aspirate. "It would appear that we have been to M-32 in *Andromeda*—and back again!"

"But we were in suspended animation," said Hudson with sudden violence. "You're crazy; it's an illusion."

"I think the evidence is obvious," said Conrad.

"But someone," said Hudson nervously, "someone among us had to have wakened to compute the return, reset the controls, replenish the anesthesia capsules, chart our course. And it's no coincidence, you know, that of all the infinitude of places we might have ended up, we've returned directly to *Earth*."

He looked at Koehler. "You're the only one who could have charted our return with such precision, Koehler; let's have an explanation."

Koehler's face reddened. "Okay,

Hudson, what about you? You're the only one who could have worked over Kilroy for the return flight! I didn't plot any course back to earth, but even if I had, you're the only one who could have gotten it back here."

Hudson lunged at Koehler who dodged the blow, grabbed at Hudson's jacket. Conrad stepped between them. "Relax," he said.

Kaye's voice was not too well controlled. "One among us, someone, must have awakened and accomplished the initial work necessary to return this ship. And he must have had a good reason. Doesn't anyone remember anything?"

No one did.

"Six hundred years—thrown away, lost," said Koehler oddly. "You'd think we would be glad it turned out this way. But we're not, are we? We're scared silly; we're scared because we know that something happened—something happened in *Andromeda*."



KOEHLER was in the observation 'blister' working over a report. "For whom, or why, I wouldn't know," he had said. Hudson was stretched out on his bed reading from a volume he had brought along entitled: *Conquest—A History of Man's Evolutionary Motivation*, by Anschull Myers. A monistic, dogmatic work that would appeal only to paranoid thinking like Hudson's.

Conrad talked with Kaye. Her hand trembled a little as he held it and looked into her eyes; he always found a great deal of strength there.

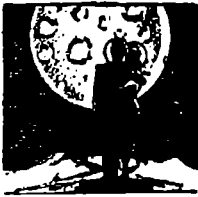
"Well," she said. "I can't find out anything. We've all been subjected to both pentathol and hypno-rays, and our unconscious minds seem to be completely blank."

"But there must have been some processes even after we went into suspended animation," insisted Conrad.

"What kind of censor would block

off both pentathol and hypno-rays, Alan? It's impossible; they'll dig out anything. Yet, I agree that there must be impressions there. Six-hundred yours—nothingness—one might almost think that life and death and time as we've known it is just an illusion like the old mystics were trying to convince every one of when we left Earth."

"Come off that," said Conrad with not all mock concern. Then doggedly. "Space-warp, whatever that might be—well, there must be *something* to explain what happened. We could have been influenced unpredictably by displacement due to intense gravitational pull, or—"



Hudson threw the book aside, jumped to his feet. "But not in six hundred years. That would hardly have allowed us to circumvent a space-warp."

"I sit corrected," said Conrad wryly.

"You two console each other," Hudson snapped; "I'm going into the control chamber and take another look at Kilroy."

Kaye stared at the panel that closed automatically behind Hudson.

Conrad said. "Don't you sense that something's happened that is—well— forbidden? Sounds ridiculous doesn't it? Anyway, I feel like the answer's in my head, in spite of your pentathol and hypno-rays. But I can't dig it out."

Her answer was low; he scarcely heard her. "It must have been so alien there, so far from earth. What was it really like? Where were we, really?" Her voice rose, sharpened.

"Alan—we've got to find out where we were. And if we even reached M-32 in Andromeda. What happened there? Why? *Why, Alan?*"

The panel opened again. Koehler lurched into the room. He stood there, white face staring, his hair a bushy

mass. His heavy mouth worked incoherently, then words spilled out. "Something's happened to Hudson! In the—control chamber!"

Conrad ran past him, Kaye followed, then Koehler. He heard the big man muttering. "I heard him go in. Then in a little while he—screamed; it sounded very bad."

Conrad found Hudson sitting on the mesh grid. His eyes bulged with a mad vacant kind of light. His hands pawed around in front of his greenish-white face. He slid back away from Conrad, moaning and crying softly.

"Hysteriform siezure," said Kaye quickly. "Maybe it's only temporary—I don't know. Meanwhile he's dangerous. I'll bring a hypo, and while he's unconscious we can lock him up in the spacesuit locker."

She returned quickly, efficiently injected Hudson while Conrad and Koehler held him with great effort. After he was locked up, inside the small room aft, Conrad asked Kaye to warm up some concentrates for them to eat before they hit Earth's atmosphere. Only a matter of a few minutes. He didn't want her to go with him then into the control chamber.

Koehler walked with Conrad as far as the door into the 'blister' where Koehler spent most of his time.

"I checked our course," he said. "We're hitting Earth dead center; a bull's eye. If I didn't know better I'd say I *did* chart this return from Andromeda; it was perfect." He closed the panel between them. Conrad went into the control chamber.

HE SAT THERE on the deep foam-rubber mats staring at the observation screen and at the smoothly clicking controls. That odd psychosomatic ache in his head was stronger now; a dull, nameless cold blew through his mind.

He shook it away partly, stared at the screen. That was Earth looming strongly. The ship was still on automatic control, thought Conrad grimly. All in the hands of Kilroy now, just a lot

of free electrons; but it was still more reliable than he would be. He could change the ship over to manual, try bringing it in himself. He wasn't a specialist, though; he knew the principle but not the practical application-experience. Only Hudson had that, and he was a raving madman.

Conrad gripped the edge of the control panel. He said into the intership audio. "Strap yourselves in your shock chairs as directed. It may be a pretty awkward landing."

Awkward was hardly the word. Kilroy was constructed to handle everything about the ship, including blast-offs and landings. But Kilroy didn't have free agency; it couldn't abstract. They'd probably smash into a charred lump.

Conrad stared awed, at looming Earth, shining twenty times brighter than the reflection from the moon. Black shadows and bright splashes of earthlight contrasted. Behind it the Sun was setting, surrounded by its corona and zodiacal light. The Moon, slightly blue with a white rim, shown behind.

Then the earth grew completely dark except where the Sun splattered down on its far half, a pool of light bright white in its center and radiating outward into dissipating orange and browns.

Conrad said into the intercom. "We're landing. We're back—home—" His voice choked off.

After six hundred years. But Earth had grown much older, though they on the ship had not. Evolutionary metabolism had an accumulative speed. After a slow start, it had moved with frightful rapidity. So much could have happened—

Conrad froze. They were low; he could see land looming that he had never really expected to see again. A splotched expanse of faded colors with tendrils of rivers and splashes of lakes faded strange blue. Along the far horizon stretched a blue and yellow mist.

He said with difficulty now into the intercom. "This is it, Kaye. I'm leery about sending an advance notice.

We've been away a long time. How the devil do we know what it's like now? What kind of a reception we'll get."

A gigantic mass of green surged across the screen, sullenly flooding it. The automatic controls clicked frantically. The scene in the screen whirled, blurred in a senseless vortex. Nausea gripped Conrad, and he knew there had been a sudden mechanical let-up in acceleration. He felt the ripping bursts of repulsion rocket fire.

Dimly like a sound in a bad dream, he heard the grinding roar. It exploded in his brain. He found himself staggering blindly out of the control chamber. Thick blackness pulled at him as he staggered down the tilted corridor. He fought desperately against the insistent darkness wooing his mind, called for Kaye, many times.

Then he felt her hand, but he saw only a frightened blur that must have been her face. He heard Kohler yell. "Hudson—in the locker! I'll get him!"

Cold air. He knew they must have gotten out of the ship. Then a blast of heat seared his face as he stumbled over rough ground. Cool air struck his face again. "Kaye," he said. "Kaye!"

But neither her voice or hand were strong enough. He drifted away, dropped on down into a dense dark; it was soft and nice there. He would stay a while.



"Alan!" Conrad would know Kaye's voice anywhere, even in a displaced nebulae, in some closed Universe, even in Andromeda. If there was such a constellation, such a thing as "time" at all in which you could lose six hundred years, and have it haunt you with some monstrous secret that you had to name, but feared to name—

"Alan, are you hurt badly? Say something!"

He tried to say something. He felt her wet face against his, her soft breath crying over him; and he wanted to say something but he couldn't.

"Alan—some men—they've taken

us prisoner. I couldn't leave you. They have us in some kind of aircraft; they're taking us somewhere. They won't say anything. I'm afraid—Alan, please open your eyes!"

He managed it then with great effort. Things went round in a colored mist. Two men over controls... a 'blister' with clouds rushing past... a spherical flying craft... wingless... moving with silent speed... Kaye's face... tears...

"Shut up, Kaye. I hate girls who cry."

He heard her hysterical voice fading away. Her face whirled, got smaller, exploded in a rain of yellow lights. Soft slumber pulled, clung. Numbness crept in. He was drifting gently on clouds of sun-yellow beauty, through splashing craters of color, symphonies of soaring song.

Andromeda, a small voice said.

M-32 in Andromeda.



OR HE HAD found Paradise. Men used to believe in Paradise, celestial spheres...

There was no familiar sky; it was golden liquid flowing down over a panorama of strange trees with foliage of topaz and sun amber that glistened and shimmered; and splashed with great seas of gigantic flowers of flaming scarlet; immense valleys of curtained mists, trembling rainbows of aureate lights, harlequined with cratered colors.

There was a lovely 'oneness', a fusion of form, of colors and music and more material reality in an ecstatic, endless chord, ringing, caroling, calling...

Gigantic birds soared through rainbow veils on wings of gleaming emerald, and pale tenuous figures swam in pearly flowing waters and showers of amethystine floods.

Sound, voices, tendrils, pale lovely faces, not human. They traveled with

him, down an endless hall of silver light. He could move; he followed their beckoning call. Gentle, sweet voices fondling him with fingers of gentle curiosity.

He felt Kaye near him—but only as a shifting tremulous cloud of freed existence. He knew she was laughing with the sheer joy of unleashed care, and the sound bubbled and tinkled and echoed through the vaulted splendor of the place like the crashing of a million tiny crystalline bells. Where her teeth might have shown he saw only glittering shafts of ivory light.

A delicate petaled face peered wonderingly into his. A small red mouth opened. A little cry of tinkling horror shattered the beauty.

"*They will destroy,*" the tiny voice said.

The cry rippled away, shimmered and shattered like exploding prisms.

"*They will destroy!*"

Evil.

Destruction. Destruction, forever.

The luminous, webbed mist suddenly darkened in wavering black veins like spilled ink, running out in darting ragged rivers of despair. The flooding symphonies of carillon song shivered, dimmed into faint dissonances and grating dischords.

A chorus of those alien frightened petal faces cried. *Evil. Destruction forever and ever. Until nothing remains.*

But only the one is evil. The other three carry the vital seeds that can grow to glory.

But the evil one must die.

The sound and the glitter fused in discordant crescendos of horror. *They must die, the evil ones, though they have never learned to live.*

It vanished. The great color-splashed forests with its crimson flowers; the jeweled birds; the petal faces and the symphonies of song. A grey suffocation closed over him and choked him in acrid vileness. He smothered and cried out. And then there was only memory that died beneath grey depthless cold.

AS HE OPENED his eyes, Conrad wondered if it were a dream. It seemed too alien and too utterly lovely, even for a dream; and it seemed to have no meaning, no possible significance. It wasn't complete. He blinked his eyes. A big bronzed figure in transparent plastic clothing of a strange design stood there.

Conrad was sitting in a low metallic chair. A heavy helmet was on his head from which thin wire tentacles led away to large gauged units. The man handed him a glass of colorless liquid and said in a barely comprehensible English vernacular. "Drink this; you will feel better."

Having no reason to doubt him, Conrad complied; meanwhile he studied the big man. His skin was dark, his face angular—not cruel—worse than cruel. It was a completely amoral face. The big man's two feet added up to only eight toes.

Conrad saw part of the big room. It was gleaming with metal, naked and harsh with no warmth. No warmth anywhere. Everything metal, benches, the machines covered with dials and gauges; there were two large tri-dimensional screens waiting lifelessly on the autoluminescent wall.

The stuff he had drank was potent; the throbbing was gone. The burning fled from his eyes, left them clear and bright. The big bronzed man's pale, emotionless eyes looked at him without any reaction at all that Conrad could see, unless it were vague distant curiosity.

"Just call me guinea pig," said Conrad. The man stared. Conrad heard a nervous laugh to his right and behind him. "Kaye!" he turned.

She was in the same predicament as he. In a low metallic chair with a silver helmet covering her violet-black hair. "Thank Mars you're conscious, Alan! I'd about given up hope."

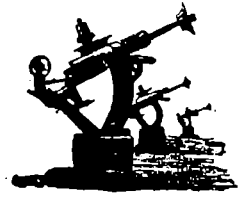
"I'm all right, Kaye. And you're looking swell, too."

The big man mused. "Curious types.

It's odd; your minds resist our probers. But you'll give in to us eventually. There are many ways remaining."

Conrad still looked at Kaye. Like him, she was bruised, cut, her clothing tattered ribbons. "Kaye, how long have we been here?"

"Just a little while. They've been trying to probe our brains. Evidently they've found nothing at all. He thinks all that pre-suspended animation content of our minds is only fantasy thinking, that we've been intentionally conditioned with meaningless thought to mislead them. He thinks we're enemies, of course. I—I haven't told him anything." Her eyes finished a meaningful message. *Don't talk, Alan. Don't tell them a thing.*



The big man brushed his thin nose with a slender hand. His voice was terse, without color. "You submen—it's hard to believe you're descendants of human stock. Living like animals in the forest, ignorant, stupid mystics! Come—what were you doing near *Shiva*?"

Conrad shrugged. Kaye said. "Shiva, that's the name of this city."

"Please," the questioner said. "Enough pretense." He turned back to Conrad. "Now. What were you doing out there? We know that you *Upinshads* are childishly plotting against Shiva. Even though you mystics claim to have nothing to do with material things such as machines, we know you had some kind of weapon out there in the forest. Children can start fires. What were you doing there?"

"I don't know; really I don't."

"You must know. The forest burned for half a mile. What kind of a weapon were you trying to use?"

"I don't know of any weapon."

"Where did you get this odd kind of cloth? When did you animals stop wearing the skins of animals?"

Conrad shook his head, studying the man. His questions didn't hold any real urgency. He wanted to know, but it didn't really matter. Evidently the Upinshads were far indeed beneath the frigid dignity of the people of Shiva.

The man stepped back. "This sort of secretive activity has forced the inevitable upon you *Upsinshads*. I can tell you because you will soon be rendered either mindless or dead, and won't be able to communicate the knowledge. The time is here; you've known it was coming. We, the Destroyers, are ready to strike outward, boundlessly outward as is our destiny. As part of it, we're going to exterminate you Upinshads. All of you. In fact, we're going to exterminate all of you within a day; we are only waiting for the decree from the Grand Shamdhi."

THE BIG man pressed a minute stud on a small round crystal on his wrist. A somewhat feminine voice, whiny and distorted, came out of it. "Yes, Lingan."

The man, Lingan, said tersely. "Come up here, Krishna. The subman's conscious now."

Conrad thought rapidly. The loneliness and shock were gone, drowned by desperate urgency.

Well, this was Earth, but it didn't mean much. He had not expected it to be much the same anyway; he had never expected to get back to Earth at all. But with his background of general knowledge and basics from the Synthesis Schools, he did recall the significance of the names.

Shiva—that was ancient Indian or Hindustan, and it meant Destroyer. City of the Destroyers. And Upinshad, too, was ancient Eastern in origin. The Upinshads were devoted to discussions of philosophy and

'intellectual mysticism'—whatever that was, or had been.

Maybe the ancient philosophies of the East had fused with Western culture. The trend had been under way long ago when they had left for Andromeda. A rebound from the futile walls of positive science into mystical worlds of Bhrama, Yoga, and the other philosophies that had arisen, supposedly, in Pamir sixty thousand years before Western Culture had started on its materialistic pathway of machine worship.

But the Upinshads had been considered a rather exalted order among the ancients. Here they were considered submen. Kaye and he were also considered as submen. "You two," he had said inclusively. Then what had happened to Hudson and Koehler? For evidently these men of Shiva knew nothing about either of them nor—

Evidently they hadn't found the ship either.

What had happened to the spaceship?

A figure that had every qualification of femininity in theory, but appearing to have very little, if any, in practice, entered with machine-like precision. She gazed coldly at Conrad. "He won't confess either, Lingan?"

"Nothing. Pretends complete ignorance."

"Maybe they are mindless. The Upinshads do have peculiar mental ability, Lingan; they have some sort of control. Remember that Yogin we captured and put through Ward Six? I still insist that he *willed* his heart to stop; there was no physical reason for him to die."

"Krisha, let's not discuss it here. I'll admit it. A subman is liable to do anything; they're unpredictable, like animals."

"Look here," she said to Conrad. "What were you two doing out there? Did you have some kind of machine?"

"I don't remember," said Conrad. "My head aches."

"Well," she said carelessly. "We'll

have to use the electrodes. The electrode needles should find something besides these meaningless fantasies about a pre-war spaceflight, and such nonsense. You realize what will happen, of course, if we use them. The mind is almost completely destroyed; only thalamic levels remain. We've sent more than one subman back into the forests as an example, with no mind. If you cooperate, we won't have to use electrode needles. You'll be permitted quick and painless extermination, and that's more than the rest of you Upinshads will get. We're going to spray that valley with atomic dust, you know, among other things."

It would be better, thought Conrad with an inward shudder, if they gloated, or looked even a little sadistic. But there was no visible emotion at all. He bluffed, for time, for knowledge. "I would tell you, but I can't remember. There was some sort of machine, then an explosion. Now there's just a dull ache in my head."

"There was a machine," she said, turning to Ligan. "It's possible he's telling the truth about the rest of it, but it isn't worth our time. Soon they'll all be exterminated. Send him to Ward Seven." She started for the door. "Peculiar dialect, sounds like an animal."

She paused by the door. "See you later, Ligan."

"Yes. Thanks, Krishna."

He turned back toward Conrad. "Well, that's it—the best way for you, too. You'll escape the very painful death the other Upinshads will know. Extermination in Ward Seven is utterly painless. You two are very fortunate Upinshads."

"I'm not quite convinced," said Conrad, and tried to think of a way out. He wasn't manacled at all, except by the metal helmet. Evidently these Shivans considered the Upinshads too inferior even to bother with on that score.

I don't want to die, he thought. Kaye either. We've been too close to it, and we know what it is.



LIGAN removed the metal helmet from Kaye's head, laid it on one of the metal benches. He turned to repeat the process with Conrad. Conrad tensed. Behind Ligan, Kaye was creeping forward, the heavy helmet risen high; a fierce determination drowned the fear in her black eyes.

The helmet made a pleasant, hollow thud against Ligan's skull. His eyes rolled up, and his body sagged down into Conrad's arms. "Magnificent," said Conrad, sincerely. "That was quick thinking; you're a real subwoman."

He told her his quickly-conceived idea even as he started stripping the torn cloth from his body, substituting the sleek, skin-tight transparent stuff wrapped around the inert Ligan. Looking down at the results of the completely transparent stuff, he said wryly. "This is almost indecent."

"An amoral society," elaborated Kaye in a small weak voice. Then, stirred by professional enthusiasm, her voice strengthened. "Eastern and Western thought merged during our little absence, Alan. Now neither of them has but vague resemblance to the old. The caste system has merged with Western love of militarism and power. Shiva, the Destroyer, rules. And philosophers, intellectuals, are now living like animals, considered as subhuman."

"Interesting, but we've got to get out of here. The forest would look wonderful to me right now, even as an animal. We've got to find Koehler and Hudson and," he hesitated, "—and the ship."

"Yes," Kaye said it with an uneasy flicker of her long lashes. "The ship. When I led you away from there, the ship was still visible."

Conrad moved the stud on Ligan's wrist radio as he had watched Ligan

do. That familiar, pseudo-feminine voice whined distortedly. "Yes, Ling-gan."

Conrad was no actor, but he made a good try. The small receiver distorted his voice; that helped. Also he was terse. "Come here." Rather peremptory, but effective.

Conrad moved over quickly to the smoothly-paneled metal door. Krishna walked in mechanically, with certainty. She stumbled, her eyes widened, her mouth opened. Conrad covered it with his hand. Her body was suddenly twisting, wiry cords; but he held her.

"Sorry," he panted, "but somehow this doesn't seem an affront to chivalry." He didn't hit her hard; but she collapsed soundlessly. "If she had any doubts about my being a subman, I'm sure her doubts have vanished."

He dragged her over to the metal chair. Together they stripped her clothing off, and Kaye put the filmy material on. It looked good on her. Or rather Kaye looked good; they studied each other.

"Fantastic," he said, then they went out through the door and down a long straight metal hall.



"No warmth here anywhere," said Conrad.

"It's natural enough," whispered Kaye. "Take every dominant trend of Earth when we left it, carry it out six hundred years along logical lines of development and where does it lead?"

"Extermination."

"You get here, inevitably. There's a synthesis of Western and ancient Eastern philosophy which were always diametrically opposed. Western mechanical positivism has been developed by the warrior class of the East. The thinkers, philosophers, idealists, relegated to barbarism. The ruling class are the militarists and materialists,

worshiping machines, gadgets, science-power, here in Shiva—amorality, statism, individual unimportance. Racial-group superiority. Subservience to state or council. It's all here; only a miracle could have made it any different."

"A bigger miracle will have to get us out of the City of Shiva," muttered Conrad as they walked with slow caution down the long cold hall.

Kaye didn't comment. The hall branched into several corridors. They walked to the left. Around a smooth curve, they found a great oval opening looking over a magnificent city—all metal. A blinding glare like molten steel struck their eyes. Mighty buildings rose to awesome heights, many blocks square at their base, cut through with skyways, and highways. Tubes of metal wound between the buildings.

Conrad leaned against the edge of the high opening, staring with rising hopelessness. That seemed an insurmountable barrier with no weapons, knowledge.

One of those spherical flying craft settled in the opening, clicking against a runway at the opening's base. The panel slid back; a thin slightly grey man started to step out.

"Let's grab the other horn," suggested Conrad, and hit the man in the face. As the figure stumbled back into the flying craft, Conrad and Kaye leaped in after him; they heard someone behind them yelling in sudden alarm.

CONRAD cast one wild glance at the control board, around the rest of the aircraft. Wingless, atomic-powered, he remembered its silent flight. The few levers on the control board were meaningless.

"Try to operate the thing," he urged as he turned, faced the men running toward them. "I'll try to keep these warriors out of here."

Kaye's voice trembled. She had been through a lot, thought Conrad grimly as he kicked one of the dark

men in the groin, parried a peculiar flat-handed punch of the other.

Dimly, he heard Kaye's voice. "I was conscious—I remember this—"

"Try to get this door shut," yelled Conrad, as the heel of the man's hand smashed hard across his nose. Tears blinded him; he dodged. The sharp ridge of hand chopped across his back. An intense pain hitched through his stomach. This man's face was a grinning mask of emotionless purpose.

Dazedly, he heard the clicking sound. The panel shot across, blocked out the face. Conrad staggered back, turned to stand beside Kaye.

Odd that these warriors carried no weapons, at least here in their City of metal. He watched her fumbling at the control levers. But maybe there was only one city of Shlva, one warrior class, so there were no opponents, no need for weapons ordinarily.

Then what did they destroy? Surely there was more to destroy than merely the Upinshads. That had sounded merely an incidental part of a vaster plan for destruction. The Universe—that must be an analogy of some sort.

The craft heaved outward. He heard a tearing grind beneath them, then a sudden, sickening acceleration hurled them skyward. "Good girl," he gasped; "get everything out of this crate you can!"

He staggered over to the cowling, looked out and down. They were suddenly very high. Conrad could see all of the City, miles of surrounding country. And the left half of the City... Conrad gazed at the spectacle, awed, overwhelmed. A gigantic bowl and in it were at least half a thousand gigantic spaceships. They were balanced with noses skyward on four wide spread levelling legs. They were huge, formidable; and they were waiting.

He mentioned them to Kaye. She kept on jerking the levers, but Conrad continued verbalizing thought, and his thought had sheered away from the ships. Something horrible about their gigantic silence. Something—unthinkable.

"This City isn't so large, Kaye. Looks like Southern California country. The ocean and peninsula—but that tremendous forest is new. And the City is many times smaller than it used to be. Florida is different, too; must be a lot lower average temperature now. The forest is all pines, conifers. I don't see any other towns or villages anywhere..."

He turned, swore softly. Kaye had passed out, was sprawled limply across the control panel.

He eased her down on the soft rubber-like synthetic of the floor. Shadows passed over the ship, darkened the cowling. Pursuers, small deadly skycraft, circling, darting. He saw long narrow snouts snap out of the crafts. Guns, power weapons of some kind. He saw no explosion, felt the effects. The craft buckled, sheered wildly in boiling air. Smoke curled delicately from the control panel. The interior was suddenly a dense choking mass of acrid gas.

He jiggled the control levers with desperate indiscriminateness, punched buttons. He felt the sudden rapid drop of their fall diminish, start again, then plunge in a plummeting path straight down. The cowling burst open. An icy wind roared through, almost sucking him out of the craft.

He saw a mass of high pointed pine peaks rushing up into his face. The skycraft spun into the topmost branches. A sweet pungent scent of pine clouded him. He heard the crash of limbs, the soft brushing of foliage. The craft groaned, bounded high in the air, crashed again, this time striking thick solid branches, and trunks, and plunging to earth.

Conrad, buffeted around, managed to protect his head with his arms. The skycraft dropped quickly, struck a large branch, rolled over and thudded heavily and with finality against solid earth.

HE DRAGGED Kaye out of the wrecked craft onto a cool, shadowed expanse of brown pine needles.

The air was crisp, cool, moving softly through the scented boughs. He carried Kaye a while until she was conscious again, and insisted on walking. Then they ran weakly through the sun-dappled quiet of the great forest.

Sometimes when they could see the solid expanse of blue sky through the high small openings between the trees, they also saw their pursuers circling doggedly.

Once they hid themselves in thick brush while two warriors of Shiva edged past with guns poised, eyes searching. They did have weapons now, elaborately coiled mechanisms suggesting basic energy. They were available when needed.

The effects of the stimulant Ligan had given them wore off soon. Old, prolonged weariness seeped into their blood, slowed them; it began to grow noticeably colder as evening slipped in through the great silent trees. And finally they dropped down, unable to force themselves another step.

Kaye was shivering. They crawled beneath the low hanging boughs of a small spruce that formed a kind of shelter from the cold wind and searching eyes. They lay there in each other's arms, fighting off the invading cold. "Babes in the darkling woods," said Conrad softly.

But Kaye was already sleeping.

Conrad remembered the nursery rhymes he had studied as a part of a course on pre-atomic psychological expression. Part of a study of inherent death impulses expressed in children during the old systems. It had a kind of terrifying nostalgia as those children's songs usually had.

"Do you remember, a long time ago, two poor little babes whose names I don't know—went out to play one bright summer's day, and were lost in the woods I've heard people say—"

The warmth from Kaye's body seeped through him slowly; a warm blanket of lassitude settled over him. Above him a night-bird sang mournfully. Some large shadowy form padded by.

Went out to play one bright summer's day—

Eighteen hundred thousand light years—and were lost in the woods I've heard people say.

And when they were dead the robins so red brought strawberry leaves and over them spread—

M-32 in Andromeda—the petal faces and horror that shattered that beautiful land? Was that a memory of Andromeda?

Extermination. Philosophers in caves sprayed with atomic dust.

And sang sweet songs the whole day long.

Poor babes in the woods.



A SHAFT of liquid, gold moonlight shown strangely on the man who had parted the low hanging boughs and was awaking him. A white-headed elderly man, with a sun-leathered face of what seemed to be infinite wisdom and kindness.

He smiled gently at Conrad, stopped shaking him, and stood up. He was clothed in animal skins; his cap was silver and black fur. Strong white teeth gleamed warmly. "Hiyah," he said. "You two had better come with me. It isn't exactly safe here. Bears and big cats get pretty hungry after dark."

Conrad said. "How did you know about us?"

"Saw you crash and followed you. Had to be careful though; the *Kshatya* were thick as flies around here for a while."

Kaye stirred, sat bolt upright, stared, then relaxed when she got a good view of the stranger.

Kshatya, mused Conrad; a slight alteration of another Eastern word for warrior class. *Kshatriya*. The men of Shiva.

The older man held out a gnarled

hand, helped Kaye to her feet. "We'd better hurry. You'll be safe with us—that is, as long as we're safe from attack. I guess that won't be for very long. But meanwhile the Rigeda fire burns brightly tonight, and you're welcome to join our great *Aum*, even if it's for the last time."

"Sure," said Conrad. They followed him along a moon-lighted path through the towering trees. The wind sang a gentle night song that had undertones of sorrow, and old, old pain.

Kaye hadn't said anything. She walked pensively, staring at the elderly man leading them.

The Rigeda Fire. Conrad dug into his memory. He didn't get the fire part, but the Rig-veda was a collection of hymns which the Aryans brought with them to India—thousands of years before Christ brought his Eastern beliefs to the West. Eastern philosophy had been the big movement throughout the world, when the four had left on their escapist flight to another constellation. And the theory then had been that soon Eastern thought as developed in Asia was to come again out of the incomputable past to rescue Western culture from suicidal materialism.

Even in his time, materialists, positivists, scientists, had been succumbing to 'intellectual mysticism' by the millions. But somehow the fusing of the two philosophies had resulted in a terrifying final form of materialism due to Western culture's obsession with machines, power, with metals and lust for conquest.

And *Aum*. A part of the mystical processes of Yoga. A great sound symbol which was supposed to set up certain rhythms and vibrations to enforce one's fusion with the allness, the oneness, of Karma.

Well, Conrad was no mystic; he wasn't a positivist either. He had always enjoyed the freedom of abstract theory. But he wasn't anything now; he was lost. It looked as though everyone was lost, caught at the end of a blind alley.

The Eastern cults had said materialism was the wrong course, an illusion. And the development of atomic weapons had made such a philosophy most attractive. But during their absence, in suspended animation, while cities rose and fell and ideas with them, what had really happened?

"Ah—hold it a minute will you?" called Conrad.

The man turned. "Call me Risha. What's on your mind, Conrad?"

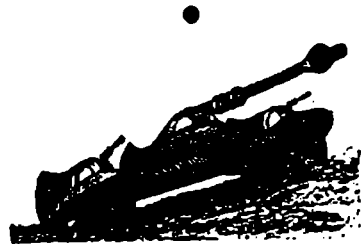
"But how did you know," Conrad began, then dropped it. "This is Kaye."

Risha nodded. "I know. There are few secrets among true *Upinshads*."

Risha, Conrad knew, had meant sage or teacher. He said. "Risha, we're strangers in our own house, or our own world. I'll explain to you about us before we go on any further, if you have the time."

"Go ahead. Talk," said Risha, "I'd appreciate it if you would hurry though. I'd like to get to the Rigeda Fire before the attack."

The attack. Conrad had almost forgotten about Lingan's statement about the extermination of the *Upinshads*. But he went on, explained everything about themselves. He was brief. You could be brief with words. With one word, one could say—eternity.



AFTER HEARING their story, Risha looked up at the sky. His long leathery face shone oddly in the pale light.

"You believe me, Risha?"

"Of course. Our Rigeda includes your journey from earth. Few records survived the war except in song."

"There was war after we left?" said Kaye in a hushed whisper.

"Yes." Risha moved away. "Only a few survived." His voice lightened. "We'll sing about your flight tonight at the Rigeda Fire."

His gaunt figure passed into dense shadow, back into a splash of moonlight. A large dark shape crashed away through the undergrowth. Fireflies wavered among the leaves. Somewhere below them an invisible stream churned down over worn stones.

"It's beautiful, this kind of life," said Kaye. "And they are going to destroy it—"

Conrad called to Risha. "Why are the *Kshatriya* going to attack you? What have they to gain?"

Risha's voice floated back to them, seeming a part of the wind through the pines, the soft voice of the night. "Because we spurn the use of machines and all the mores of their kind of culture, they think we're inferior beings. And it is part of their belief that 'inferior' peoples should be exterminated. Then, in spite of their thinking us inferior, they fear us a little; they know we've developed mental abilities they don't understand. There are three castes of us *Upinshads* living in isolated Leagues in this valley. The *Kshatya* will finish us this time; there's nothing we can do. There's really nothing we want to do."

"Don't you want to go on living?" asked Kaye.

"Yes. It would be more interesting to know what part of reality the surface called 'death' is before meeting it, but it doesn't make any difference. In *Samyama* we have learned much. Still we've found only a small part of reality. Given more time, we might know Karma. But we haven't the time; perhaps in some other plane we will go on with the search."

"We know nothing about what happened during our absence," said Kaye.

"Much has happened. Much destruction, regression, near extinction. The ancients knew the road to Karma, the road through three-dimensional

illusion into fourth-dimensional reality; they knew many centuries even before your time, before any records of the Western world began. But the Destroyers came and distorted it, and materialism hid reality. Remember—through history there have always been these people who sought only to destroy and conquer and destroy. There have been others, the thinkers and philosophers; but the Destroyers have won because they forced the thinkers to accept their illusory philosophy. Now it's too late to fight back; we would have to fight them on their own materialistic plane which would be futile. Violence only creates more violence; means must justify the ends."

"The war must have been a horrible thing," said Kaye. "When we left for Andromeda; there seemed little chance for a war—not with atomic power."

"People feared an atomic war," said Risha sadly. "But trapped by unreal material philosophies they seemed helpless. Eastern philosophy swept the world, urging non-attachment to the 'things of this visible world'. Even scientists flocked into the various cults by the thousands. For it was science, really—cosmology that was aware of many other realities underlying the narrow concepts of the phenomenal world. This ancient Eastern philosophy spread like a great fire. But it came too late. War. It was almost final. Only a few left..."

RISHA WALKED silently for a while. The night seemed to echo an unfinished thought, a voiceless whisper of horror.

"It left few people on the Earth. Most of the heavily-inhabited places became radioactive seas of poison. Certain parts of the world remained untouched. This was the one most attractive to those wretched people who still lived. And the City of Shiva rose. The others, the *Upinshads* who sought true reality, were driven into the forests and scorned as idiots. For we retained the old teachings, and we knew that the 'reality' of the materialists

was illusion, and that it led only to final destruction.

"Now the *Kshatya* are through with Earth. It offers no roads to conquest; they're abandoning it in ruins and death."

"I saw the spaceships," said Conrad. "They're all leaving?"

"Most of them; the others will be killed. There are only a few thousand of them."

Risha paused and looked to the West. "They never intend to come back to Earth. They're going to burn their conquered worlds behind them. Conquered worlds, conquered galaxies. For them, there's no end."

Conrad felt Kaye's hand, suddenly damp and cold. "It seems too fantastic and ridiculous, yet it isn't really," she said. "It was bound to end this way. If the pattern is conquest, it must find expression. What man imagines, he creates. What he imagines, he destroys."

"And the attack will be soon," said Conrad.

"We know it will be within a day. We've studied, spent many years and generations in the halls of *Samyama*. But Karma's still a very distant concept for us. We've caught moments of reality through the three dimensional veils. But we haven't even started yet. If we only had more time; relaxing time—"

"But surely there's some way to fight or resist them," insisted Conrad.

"Violence?" Risha laughed softly. "That's only part of the old, old fallacy. The means determine the nature of the ends produced. Violence can never end in anything but more violence; that's only part of the illusion of a restricted illusory three dimensional world."

"*Babes in the woods*," said Conrad, and caught himself smiling grimly, without humor.

Kaye said. "Remember, Alan, how positivistic methods were breaking down? People were dissatisfied."

"Naturally," said Risha. "Everyone was afraid. Five senses, three di-

mensions. And the rulers held people within that restricted area like herded animals, wouldn't let them escape. But these five organs of sense are in reality just feelers by which we feel the world around us. The three-dimensional man lives groping about. *He's never seen anything!*"

"Scared of the dark," said Conrad.

Her hand tightened. Far away toward the West they heard a rumble of what might have been thunder. "They're getting ready," said Risha.

The three walked on, coming to a sheer cliff looming up blackly, and Risha led them inside, around a black corridor and after a while into a large subterranean cavern. There were people, people in animal skins sitting around a fire. Philosophers in caves.

The *Rigeda Fire*. The people were singing. Hymns out of a lost Hindu history sixty thousand years old, interwoven with many sagas of the intervening centuries.

THE PEOPLE greeted them, acknowledged their presence, their history, with gentle tolerant smiles, then returned to their singing, dark eyes reflecting the flames of the *Rigeda Fire*.

Risha stood silhouetted against the flames.

"*Manu*," he said ringingly. The singing died. "*Samyama*."

There was wisdom here, thought Conrad. He saw it in the twisting shadows in the cave, in the faces staring into the flames. Wisdom of many ages. Mysticism had fused with science; science's primary concern, ultimately, had always been with the invisible. Twentieth century mysticism had been the beginning of a newer science of the fourth dimension, of non-Aristotelianism, the same



as alchemy and astrology had led the way into 'sciences' of a more acceptable kind.

They had felt the fourth dimension.

"When we reach the fourth dimension, we'll see that the world of three dimensions doesn't really exist, and has never existed! That it was the creation of our own fantasy, a phantom host, an optical illusion—anything one pleases excepting only reality."

But Ouspensky had talked only to the stars. A few people heard. Too late. Shiva ruled.

"Infinity isn't an hypothesis, but a fact, and such a fact is the multidimensionality of space and all it implies, namely the unreality of everything three dimensional."

"A restriction of only two dimensions is inconceivable to a man. A restriction of three dimensions is equally inconceivable to a fourth-dimensional consciousness. And the fourth dimension..."

The Hindus had called it Karma: *"Everything will exist in it always."* It was the eternal now of the Hindus. But whatever one labeled it, perhaps these Upinshads, hindered by ancient forest mysticism, were again on the right track. They needed time.

People had broken faith with 'science' and had sought a higher reality which they called Karma. The dissatisfaction with science had been well grounded, and the complaints about its insolvency entirely just, because science had really entered a cul de sac out of which there had seemed no escape; and the official recognition of the fact that the direction it had taken had been wrong had been realized—too late!

These philosophers living in caves practicing ancient Hindu rituals of non-attachment, were on a saner road. But the Men of Shiva were destroying them. Because the Men of Shiva had been made for destruction.

Aum. Aum. Aum.

The chant rose stronger and vibrantly from those around the fire. Conrad gazed into the hypnotic flames.

And suddenly, without any physical motivation, the flames burst, lifted up and up, roaring and sighing. But no one had put any fuel in the fire!

He remembered. The power to identify oneself with any object!

Samyama!

The brilliant body of the Rigeda Fire lifted higher and higher, ate out the high cold shadows of the cavern's roof.

And died.



THE DISTANT thunder sounds continued, rolling nearer and nearer from the City of Shiva.

The ceremony of Samyama, of identification, continued also, oblivious to their approaching destruction.

Aum. Aum. Aum. Aum—

Kaye whispered. "The psychologists had words for this sort of thing. Auto-suggestion was one. That was a good word, then; what does it mean now? Alan—look!"

The pile of wood fuel beside the fire seemed to shimmer, shift. The top piece shivered, trembled as though some invisible nervous hand were grasping it. Abruptly it rolled down from the top of the heap, scuttled across the stone floor like a live thing; it slowed, slowed, did not quite reach the flames.

The chanting of the sound-symbol *Aum* died in a sigh of resigned failure; then the Rigeda hymns began again.

Risha sat down beside them. "You see. We only touch the barest fringe of the higher plane of reality in which all is one. We need so much more time. But Shiva wins."

He sat staring into the flames, his lean face like rough brown stone in the light. "Karma," he whispered. "The unbroken oneness—only the in-

visible, the hidden, preserve for us the illusion of time."

"You believe that everything is—is one," said Kaye. "So death is only a part, a facet of a larger perspective?"

Risha nodded, his eyes bright with inner fire. "We know nothing of reality. Only glimpses, touches. Death isn't an end, any more than birth is a beginning. It's all part of the 'eternal now'. Our three dimensional world we see is only surface, part of the fourth dimensional plane. Death's only a part of a part of a surface. We have no fear of it."

Conrad was on his feet. "I wish I had your faith, Risha, my friend. To me, the invisible remains invisible. Death has a horrible finality for me." He lifted Kaye by the hand. "Let's get out of here—as far from this valley as we can."

She nodded. "I guess I'm still with you in the third dimension; I think I'd prefer almost any dimension to the third right now. Let's go."

"You can't escape the Men of Shiva," said Risha. "Or even if you could, why prolong the inevitable?"

"We've got to live," said Conrad. "I don't know why; maybe with you Upinshads, working long enough, we could find out why."

Risha smiled with sad tolerance. "You still think in positivistic terms, but you're a real Upinshad, anyway. You're not evil; you have little of the Kshatya's blood. Just remember, Conrad, that your three-dimensional world is narrow, only a concept involving small sections and surfaces of reality. Remember that the cause of the visible is the invisible."

Conrad smiled tightly. "You coming with us, Risha?"

"Where? The Ship of Shiva will turn this whole continent into a radioactive hell. They'll leave no intelligent life on this world when they go!"

But he followed them out of the cavern into the clear cool night, and a soft-voiced grey-haired woman held his hand and walked with him.

OUTSIDE they stood for a moment listening to the distant thunder.

"Have you no machines, no weapons at all?" persisted Conrad.

Risha shrugged. "The mind is its own reality—it contains the stuff from which we create our illusory machines. The mind needs no shiny symbols, no machines to grind it to destruction. Wha—"

Interrupting Risha's 'truth', a shape stumbled toward them from the line of darkly ingrown trees. "Koehler!" yelled Conrad.

The big man stumbled to his knees. Conrad dropped beside him, supported him there. Koehler's face was scratched and bloody; he gazed blindly at Conrad and the others, then groaned sudden recognition. "Hello, Conrad. How's the coordinating business?" He coughed, gasped for breath.

Conrad felt his big frame shiver. "Where've you been, Koehler? What's happened? Where's the ship?"

Koehler licked his heavy lips. "I guess I'm insane. I can't figure anything; I feel like I've been walking in a fog; I can't see anything!"

"How'd you get here?"

"The Ship brought me. It landed over there about a hundred yards. I heard your voices, I guess, I don't know. I saw a light. Something chased me, something big that roared. If it had caught me—"

"What happened after we landed? You were going to unlock Hudson—"

"Yes, well—I stayed in the ship, tried to get to the locker and get Hudson out. I didn't make it; the ship knocked me out. Hudson was still in that locker when I came to. He was yelling. He kept saying, 'Stop the ship! Damn them! Stop the ship!'"

Koehler lifted a big raw hand to his eyes. "You won't believe this—but about then I began to realize that the ship was in the air, coasting along on stratospheric power. I ran into the control chamber. There wasn't anyone there, never had been. Listen now—I

know that the ship blasted off alone!"

"What?"

"Sure, I'm crazy; I can't help it. It landed again, too—and no one was at the controls. The ship went out to sea, landed out there in the water, just off shore in a fog, and sat there. It was waiting for something. I could hear Hudson screaming, but I knew I shouldn't let him out."

Koehler raised his tortured eyes. "Conrad! The ship's alive!"

Koehler threw off Conrad's hands, staggered to his feet, weaved. He stared at Risha, at the woman standing beside him gazing serenely at the sky. A flash of white fire curved upward exploding in pyrotechnic pillars far away above the mountains. "You say the ship brought you here, Koehler?"

Koehler's mouth twitched. "You don't believe me, and I don't care."

"I believe you," said Conrad. "The ship brought you here, right?"

"Right or wrong, it did," said Koehler. His hands trembled as he pushed them through his thickly entangled hair. "Look, I don't know what really happened. I know Hudson wasn't piloting the ship, nor I. I kept Hudson locked up and as far as I know he still is. I wouldn't let him out; he's a screaming maniac. *Stop the ship!* he keeps yelling over and over. *Destroy the ship!* I don't know why he keeps yelling that, do you?"

"Not yet," said Conrad half to himself. "The ship landed on the sea, you say—then what?"

"Well, it just sat there on the water; it was waiting. I don't know what for. It was so still there, so quiet in the fog. I tried to get out of the ship, but the doors wouldn't open. When I tried to work the lever, I couldn't. I couldn't touch it. I tried—"

Koehler sucked in his breath. "I wondered about the ship. I couldn't stop moving. I was afraid; I admit it. Every time I started to think, I got scared. 'Eighteen hundred thousand light years,' I'd say to myself, 'and

no one remembers anything. Six hundred years all shot to hell.' And all the time I could feel the ship around me. It's alive, I know it's alive!"

Koehler's shaggy head twisted. "Who's this?"

CONRAD explained; he told about the City of Shiva, and about the Upinshads, the philosophers who had been driven into the caves; about the Kshatriya.

"It's time now; they're going to strike," the woman beside Risha said in her calm serene way. And Risha answered. "Yes. This is the Time of Shiva."

Koehler started to speak, stood silently gazing skyward. There was a tremendous streaming blue fire, then a wave of wind. Far down the valley was audible the repercussions of great explosions. A blast of boiling air swept them. The great pines bent low, snapped back, quivering.

"This is madness," yelled Koehler. He shook his fists at the rising mushroom rooms of fire. "They're planning to conquer the Universe?" He threw back his head and laughed wildly. "The Universe! A few hundred ships manned by a bunch of crackpots who—" He stopped laughing, stared at Conrad. His voice dropped to a whisper.

"But they can, can't they? They're human; they can go on and on once they get started. What can stop them? *What?* I hate myself because I'm human too. They'll go on destroying, tearing everything out of their way until—" his voice died.

A buried ache in Conrad's head shot out burning sparks. A small musical voice, trembling like shattered glass, said: "*They will destroy.*"

"*Destruction. Destruction, forever.*"

Risha put an arm about the woman. Conrad heard him say. "If we'd only a little more time, Madge. We're at the gate."

Another tremendous explosion shook

the world. A gigantic flash shone like a new sun across the sky; the whole country was lighted by a searing brilliance, like the strange glowing of a new and deadly aurora borealis, golden, purple, violet, gray, and blue, rising through intensities of heat into the X-ray part of the spectrum, into invisibility. The darkness of the forest became pits of flashing light; every distant peak and crevasse and ridge assumed a horrible clarity and beauty.

A few seconds later came the air blasts pressing hard, followed by howling roaring sound. A wind of hurricane proportion hurled them along the ground. There was doomed finality in the awesome roar and supernal fire.



CONRAD crawled against the howling winds to Kaye's side. He heard the blundering frantic flight of animals crashing wildly through the glimmering hell; saw wild eyes blazing madly as they bounded down the valley toward the sea. He gripped Kaye's arm. "The ship," he gasped. "It's our only chance." He turned, yelled at Koehler a few feet away. Fine debris rained on them in clouds of minute spray.

Koehler stood facing into the wind, shaking his fists, swearing.

"Snap out of it, Koehler. Lead us to the ship! Know where it is?"

"I guess so. I can try to find it. But I'll not board her, not that ship, it's alive!"

"Maybe we can stay alive if we find it."

Clutching each other's hands they fought their way into the moaning wind. Conrad turned, yelled at Risha who stood with his arm about the woman. They were looking quietly toward the distant fires. Conrad

turned away from them. They didn't care; nothing mattered. They had known a part of Karma, a touch of 'reality'. Maybe these Upinshads were insane. What was reality? Karma. Fourth-dimension. Words. But no one had ever answered the enigma poised by Kant. "*What was the thing-in-itself?*"

Babes in the woods.

Conrad yelled hoarsely. Koehler had broken away, was running ahead through the mad, distorted shadows between tortured trees. Conrad and Kaye stumbled after him. "You sure this is the way?"

Koehler's lurching form weaved faster through the toppling forest. Weird lights played across the sky; tides of fear-crazed animals, whining and shrieking, surged blindly down the disintegrating valley.

Ahead of Conrad, Koehler's body was ripping through brush, tearing branches aside. Conrad heard him swearing and crying by turns. Kaye struggled silently, her face a white blob, drained by the glaring whiteness of the distant heat.

"It's right here somewhere," shouted Koehler. "Somewhere—"

A trembling roar rolled over them in a colossal sea. Conrad screamed as the pain of high velocity compression waves tore through him; he went down. He crawled, and he saw Kaye dragging toward him, edging slowly over the buckling ground.

Debris, fine and large, pelted him with bullet-like force. Trees crashed in long, splintering cracks. He felt Kaye's hand in his. They were managing to regain their feet, fight out through a barrier of imprisoning branches. The sky was a seething tide of cloud-boiling smoke and flame. A blast of furnace air sucked into his lungs; he coughed, staggered, cried out.

Conrad felt his foot on something soft. He dropped down. He tugged Koehler's body partly from beneath a shattered tree trunk. Splinters of

wood had pierced his stomach; he lay motionless. Koehler looked calm, sane for the first time since they had awakened on the ship; he was dead.

Kaye moaned, staggered as though blind. Swimming through only dim reality himself, Conrad pulled her after him in the direction Koehler had been leading them. Fires burst up around him, seared his face. An antelope sprang past, aflame, shrieking with its graceful neck twisted in an arc of pain.

Red rage, redder than the sky, rose in Conrad. There had seemed to be no possibility of war when they had left in the ship long ago. But man had always rationalized that way. After each orgy, he brushed away the vile film of its touch, and said, "*No more. We've outgrown it. We're too civilized now.*"

Six hundred years ago they had said that, eighteen hundred thousand light years. But there were still men who could only destroy, forever; they knew nothing else. The extent of inherent characteristics had never been known. Perhaps the will-to-power, and destruction, was hereditary, and only death would cure it.

And it had evolved to form the City of Shiva with a few thousand star-vikings in galleys shaped like spaceships. Planets, solar systems, galaxies would be ravaged, pillaged, burned.

*Evil, the little dreamed faces sang
Destruction. Destruction, forever.*

The evil ones must die.

But those voices were only dreams. Dreams were naive, wishful thinking. The *Kshatriya* of Shiva, under whatever label one chose, had conquered; Earth was going down into final destruction. Earth was only the beginning. "*The end of the beginning,*" someone had said long before, prophetic beyond his wildest nightmares.

CONRAD picked up Kaye, staggered forward; he slipped down a sharp incline. He felt the fire licking him; it was hungry. He dropped

Kaye with sharp whines of horror, began beating at the flames around him. He knew agony, knew it in every screaming fiber of himself as he strained, half-blinded, choking, blinded, by smoke.

And then a curtain of smoke swirled aside and he saw the gleaming silver and black hull. It sat there, immobile, implacable, in the chaos of flames and crashing forest.

He sobbed. He dragged Kaye after him toward the smooth outline of the outer lock. Almost to it, he staggered, went down on his face. He crawled then, dragging her along, though he wondered where the strength was, where the will. Visible effect, invisible because—

He was sinking down, giving up, and the door opened for him. Somehow he dragged Kaye inside, through the air-lock chamber, and through the inner door.

The ship trembled around him, and he knew it was blasting off. He tried to turn his head, but he couldn't. He was sprawled out on his back, stirring weakly. A voice, a thought, in his fevered mind ripped with fiery urgency.

*Remember, Conrad, the voice said.
Remember. Fight, before it's too late!
Remember us, Conrad, and the City
of Light.*

And of course he did remember; because *they* wanted him to. Because there was something depending on the memory that he had to do—now; something of fearful urgency.

IT WAS a lonely-looking, isolated sun on the distant rim of the galaxy. They wakened, Kaye and he, and saw the small elfin petal faces swimming through high layers of air that glowed with soft pearly luminescence.

The ship's automatic pilot had thrown them into an orbit around a small world that crowded against a

tiny red sun for warmth. Koehler and Hudson kept on sleeping; the alien things out there had awakened Kaye and Conrad only.

Their small petal faces beckoned, hovering in shimmering clouds on membranes as fluttering and delicate as tendrils of rainbow.

The great jeweled birds he remembered from that other dream returned, winging across an opaline sky. And the petal-faced people looked in at Conrad out of huge golden eyes flecked with iridescent colors that changed.

Conrad didn't know whether their bodies or their minds followed the petal-people down to their City of Light. Conrad felt no fear, only ecstasy; hand in hand with Kaye he floated down through warm cloud layers into that crystalline jewel city of light and song and jade pools.

Communication was mental, or perhaps something even more incomprehensible. It was thought-communication that was partly music, partly movement of color: but there was utter understanding.

And at that moment of mutual understanding—that was when the beauty shattered, became darkened as with stains of wretched ink; the music broke into dissonances and dischords.

For these were alien people who had forgotten ugliness; they lived, breathed, drank, floated in beauty; they swam in a vast sea of it. They were alien to all ugliness and fear and hate. And they found all that was alien to their beauty in the minds of their visitors.

Conrad felt their reactions, saw their round tiny mouths wide with silent fear. Wide golden eyes that seemed to cry.

"They come from a diseased place; they will carry plagues of violence and death wherever they go."

"They are blind; they are lost in a nightmare of illusion."

"But there is hope for them!"

"Yes. There is hope."

"Their minds show that all of them are not evil; they are not all the same. They think they are the same, obsessed with the delusion of similarity. They are of many kinds; some are driven by thirsts that make them destroy and rule; others seek only truths, and these desire to build. There are others who have no positive impulses at all, but float in a strange, unreal land of grey shadows."

"Yes. These two are not evil; they have come here to escape evil."

"But the two who did not awaken—one is evil and would destroy; the other knows only grey despair."

Conrad could see Hudson, his eyes bright with dreams of conquest and the grandeur of power. He could see Koehler the lost, battling indecision, uncertainty, dreaming his futile dreams.

"Their world trembles with the rule of evil beneath which the builders and seekers are helpless. The evil ones must be destroyed; their dark dreams are limitless as the stars are numbered in all the galaxies."

"These minds carry the ultimate plans of the evil ones. Read the plans of the evil ones here, the plans to destroy and conquer."

"Death!"

"Evil!"

"Destruction. Destruction, forever."

"We must send them back. Place the spark in their machine, for their machine is built for the spark. Erase our memory from their minds; they must not know until it is done. They must not be moved to act against our purpose. When the evil ones are destroyed, then these two may know; they may return to us then, should they desire."

"Yes. They may return to us."



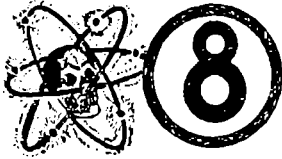
Conrad groaned as the far sounds died, vague murmurings, rippling, falling away in far sweet tinklings. He had remembered now because they

had willed that he should remember. Voices from far Andromeda. M-32 in Andromeda.

And as Conrad struggled to his knees, he knew why this moment had been chosen for him to remember.

Silently, with deadly purpose, Hudson was creeping toward him across the small compartment. He had managed to break out of the sult locker. His intentions were obvious as he raised the alloy bar above his bloody head. He was going to kill; and he was going to wreck the ship.

That was why Conrad had remembered, so he would know what to do. He had to prevent Hudson's madness from wrecking the ship. It didn't want to be wrecked yet. It still had its assigned job to do.



THERE WAS little about the murderer coming toward him that Conrad remembered. He clutched the bar in one hand. His eyes glared with fanatical purpose; his hands and face were bloody and bruised from crashing against the walls of his prison.

Hudson hesitated, face twitching, eyes roving with fear and hate. "You're in with the ship, Conrad. You're going to help the ship. Help *them* against your own species! That's what you'd like to do, but you won't. Unless I destroy this ship, it'll wipe out the human race. I don't want that, Conrad."

Kaye stirred, moaned gently, lifted an arm. Hudson swore at her. Conrad got one foot under him, managed to stand. Around him he could feel the steady throbbing of the ship's powerful motors. "You can't touch this ship, Hudson. It's too big for you."

"Traitor! Idiot!" snarled Hudson. "They've blinded you! I've known

about them and their purpose; I've felt them. *They* drove me out of my mind, and had you lock me up. But I've won out. I'm stronger than *they* are. But you're insane, Conrad. Fighting with aliens against your own species! Insane!"

"Only against a part of humanity, Hudson—a part that should have been wiped out a long time ago. Men like you."

Hudson's eyes shifted; the ship throbbed, pulsed under them like a great heart.

He yelled suddenly, harshly. His muscles strained as against some invisible power, then he hurled himself at Conrad. The bar fell. Weakly Conrad managed to duck his head aside, but the heavy metal smashed into his shoulder. Numbness stiffened that arm, left it lifeless. He rolled aside on the grid mesh as the bar swung hungrily at his head. The bar sung past his ear, bounded from the bulkhead. Hudson swore, dropped the bar from hands momentarily paralyzed by the shock of metal on metal. Conrad pushed the bar with his good hand, sent it spinning across the mesh and under a low shelf.

Conrad got to his knees in time to meet Hudson's maniacal attack. They strained. Conrad felt dark waves of blind nausea billowing about him. He tried to pull those sweating bloody hands from his throat; but they were clamped there with a terrible kind of purpose.

Dimly he saw Kaye weaving toward them; then he heard a scream as Hudson kicked her savagely, sent her smashing back against the bulkhead. She sagged down slowly, and kept on sitting there.

RAGE GAVE Conrad enough strength to kick upward with his knee. Hudson groaned, bent back, and his hands slipped away, returned as knotty madly beating clubs. Dull, jolting pain exploded in Conrad's

head. He was falling back; he was lying there looking up at Hudson's heaving body leaning over him. It was a strange-looking body. It shimmered and wavered back and forth, got small, then large.

Conrad thought dully. *I can't move. I want to, but I can't.*

He thought of the ship, the ship that lived. It had intelligence; but it could only operate within the limitations of its bodily structure, and it was only a machine. It couldn't help him now. Could it even defend itself from an enemy who was *inside* of it? Conrad wondered. He realized that he knew nothing at all about the ship now that *they* had altered it. *They* had given it the 'spark'. What specialized function it had now, he couldn't know. Besides, he couldn't move to anything about it if he did know.

He watched Hudson's blurred figure dig the bar out from under the shelf, stand clutching it a moment hesitantly. Then he strode resolutely toward the panel leading into the corridor to the control chamber.

The man's intentions were inevitable. He would smash that automatic pilot. 'Kilroy's' hard vacuum brain case.

The panel slid open. Hudson started through, gripping the bar in his two hands.

The panel darted shut with quick determination; it closed on Hudson's neck. With a kind of triumphant horror Conrad heard the dying cries, saw the body jerking and kicking futilely in the vise of the door. The panel kept on closing. Conrad shuddered, managed to let his eyes fall shut. The panel had closed tight, closed completely.

The ship's acceleration fell off suddenly. He heard the air sighing against the ship's stressed skin. Wherever it had been going, it had gotten there.

Kaye disappeared from his restricted vision, returned. He felt the needle sink smoothly into his arm. He felt the sudden artificial fire brighten his

blood, clarify his vision, shoot energy into his depleted system.

They avoided the horror blocking the floor by the panel, hurried into the control chamber.

Below them, through the observation screen, they saw the City of Shiva. But Conrad's first impression of the city had altered; through what had seemed before an indestructible fortress, chaos ran screaming through many layered tiers of crumbling grandeur.

The ship trembled around them. They saw the dropping rain spilling from beneath them onto the city. Gigantic mushrooming clouds of boiling dust and churning debris shot toward them. A white cloud plumed upward through the center of the blackness. Seconds later came a sustained awesome roar.

As the gigantic column of smoke writhed away, Conrad saw the half a thousand Ships of Shiva again; most of them remained untouched. More explosions leaped skyward, edging toward the ships.

The rows of great ships was the vortex of milling swarms of small dark specks. Then suddenly in a drowning cushion of blasting flame, one of the ships began a slow acceleration. From it, Conrad saw rockets emerge, small, dark and deadly. They plunged straight for their attacking ship.

"Five hundred to one," muttered Conrad.

"Come on, Kilroy!" Kaye said.

One by one the rocket bombs exploded harmlessly in the air. They felt their own ship bend away in an abrupt curve of tremendous speed. Conrad watched the rising ship of the *Kshatriya* arching toward them supported by a surging column of blue flame.

Their own ship bucked, recoiled, strained. Conrad fought dizziness that threatened blackness. His vision blurred, cleared with great effort of will. The rising spaceship ceased to

exist in any visible form. It flamed in the sky like a miniature sun, then became nothing, nothing at all except shattered energy.

Their ship climbed up and up until the entire City and the grounded Ships of Shiva were all part of a small confused pocket in a bowl. They saw the gigantic cloud of falling bombs, dropping like metal rain. Then there was nothing below them but an incredible rising blossom of seething black, billowing gas. An awesome final roaring encompassed them, buffeted the ship.

They circled far over the Sierras, returned when the gas had partly cleared. Kaye gripped Conrad's arm. There was nothing down there now but a colossal blackened crater. It was huge, and of great depths with tendrils of aimless smoke curling out of it through clouds of fine debris. There was nothing else down there; not even small rubble. There was nothing to preserve even a memory of *Shiva*.

"It was a bad memory," said Conrad wearily. "It took a long time to get rid of it."



THE SHIP later set them down in a forest clearing, opened its doors for them. They walked away from it in the warm early-morning sunlight, turned looked at it. It wasn't moving. It wasn't saying anything. But it was alive. As they looked at it, the air-lock doors slid noiselessly open once more, and remained open—a question. The ship waited their answer.

Kaye's voice was thick. "Well—shall we? They invited us."

He didn't answer for a while. He remembered the City of Light. A City of incomparable wonder across nine hundred thousand light years. He shook his head. It wasn't that he didn't want to go. Yes, it was beautiful there, but it wasn't human. It wasn't for them; he felt the truth of that; and he knew that if they went to

that City of Light again they would never come back to Earth. And Conrad knew that Earth would be a lot different now, a lot better. It had gotten rid of an old disease.

The ship knew; its doors closed. For protection they covered their eyes, stumbled back into the forest. When they opened their eyes and looked, the ship was gone.

They started walking down the valley slowly, along a small wild stream. Warmth from the water made a faint fog in the morning chill. They walked through areas that were blackened, burned; into others that were green and fresh.

"You were right, Alan. We belong with the Upinshads, mystical or not. No matter what the name is, they're on a right road."

Conrad shrugged. "I wouldn't know. I don't think we're quite so lost now, anyway. We're out of the woods."

"It would have been nice there, though, in the City of Light," said Kaye. "They saved us, and the Upinshads. But their main motive was self-preservation." She paused. "So much space and time, yet there was unity in it all, Alan!"

"I know." Conrad looked at the cloudless blue sky. "They knew human psychology, and they knew about the two basically different kinds of human pathology—both fanatical, both abnormal, but one good, the other destructive. They planned well, caught the forces of Shiva unawares with a terrifically weaponed ship the Kshatriya didn't even know existed. They would have found out about the ship too, if those people in Andromeda hadn't blanked out their minds so thoroughly."

"They looked in our minds, and they read the whole future of men. They saw what had to be done, and they did it, with terrible efficiency. And they made a genius and a hero out of 'Kilroy.' That's where they put the 'spark.'"

Conrad kicked a stone into the water. "Kilroy was close to being able to think anyway."

"Let's rest," suggested Kaye. "We've got lots of time from here on." She stopped, repeated the word. "Time."

Conrad stretched out on the bank of the stream with a long sigh. Kaye rested her head on his arm. They looked at the sky until their eyes closed.

"Time," he repeated sleepily. "Positive science and the concepts of Karma agree on that anyway. The unbroken consecutiveness of phenomena. Events most distant from one another, touch one another in—well—the fourth dimension? The unity, the 'oneness' of Karma, becomes a 'timeless fourth-

dimension' of theoretical physics. This whole episode of ours—involving over six hundred years of so-called 'time' and 'space'—eighteen hundred thousands light years and generations of men. Yet for us it was a unity of consecutive consciousness."

Her voice stirred, half sleeping. "I'll bet poor Kilroy's lonesome. I wonder if he's—?"

Her voice trailed away. He looked at her worn face, relaxed now, soft and childlike in its cushion of brilliant hair.

He closed his eyes. Vaguely he heard birds calling. The splashing of fish in the stream. The soft droning of insects.

"Babes in the woods—"

